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## The Perils of Movement Parties: An Investigation of Political Parties in Mexico and Argentina

Principal Investigators: Dag Mossige

In the United States and Western Europe, political parties are often placed along a left-right continuum. In Latin America, however, some parties defy this kind of categorization. Examples of such parties include the Partido Justicialista, or Peronist party, in Argentina and the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) in Mexico.

In his dissertation, Dag Mossige classifies the PRD and Peronist party as "movement parties" and explores the structure and development of these political organizations.

The term "movement party" was originally developed for the "anti-party" Green and extreme-right parties that surged in Europe in the 1980s. Mossige finds this term highly adaptable in the Latin American setting since movement parties there straddle the line between social movements and more traditional party structures.

Movement parties in Latin America avoid formal organization and are often disdainful of traditional parties. They emphasize participation in "politics of the street" rather than the parliamentary arena, and typically have few formal mechanisms for solving internal disputes. Such movement parties are often highly volatile and can challenge democratic stability.

Funding from the Mershon Center allowed Mossige to spend seven months in Mexico, exploring the nature of the PRD — the country's second-largest political party. He poses the questions: What makes movement parties change, and when do they evolve into more stable political structures?

Mossige conducted more than 70 interviews with the top



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echelons of the PRD, including its principal leadership, former presidential candidates, senators, federal deputies, representatives in both houses of congress, and principal founders. He also held informal conversations with lower-ranking party members, who provided a perspective "on the ground."

By gaining access to the party's archives at the Instituto de Estudios de la Revolución Democrática, Mossige explored the history of the PRD. He attended party conferences and participated as an observer in the party's highly contested internal elections held March 16, 2008, in which more than 1.5 million members voted.

Mossige gathered valuable qualitative and quantitative data on the PRD's internal organization, often considered a "black box" in the literature on political parties. His research in Mexico strengthened the comparative nature of his dissertation, allowing him to juxtapose his PRD data against research previously done on the Peronist party in Argentina.

In his preliminary analysis, Mossige argues that the loose structure and vague ideologies of movement parties thrive when a nation's main political cleavage is not along the left-right continuum. Discourse tends to be framed in terms of friends vs. enemies, a hallmark of political parties in Latin America. However, when the position of a movement party's leadership begins to crystallize on a left-right line its structure moves toward a more formal organization.

Mossige claims that political elites hold the key to transforming parties through the mechanism of ideological crystallization. While external conditions do play a role, a movement party's structure is largely determined by its internal leadership. Mossige will explore such findings in his doctoral dissertation in political science.

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